Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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Editorial

The New Millennium

A thousand years is too weighty a subject for me to deal with. I will limit myself to the standard greetings of Happy New Year. But in passing I would like to remind you of my reference to the New Renaissance, in Newsletter, December 1999. Let us live our lives in accordance with the laws of nature in which case we might survive for another 1000 years.

Kihim Diary

We were in Kihim from 24th October to 24th November, 1999 and Anish Andheria has written in this issue about his visit to our place during this period. But while in Kihim I was looking over the 'AKHBAR BOOK' which gives 'KHABAR' about old days, and I found the following notes by Salim Ali :

"I shall confine myself merely to certain happenings in the sphere of local ornithology. There is nothing unusual in the happenings, but these will be interesting records after 50 years. The generation now in the bud, of whom I have high hopes will find them so (I hope)."

"Two flocks of flamingos (60 and 26) flying North on 23.4.43; 2 pairs green bee-eaters and one pair white breasted kingfishers nesting in Al Murad compound. Pitta and blue-cheeked (or Blue-tailed ?) bee-eaters appeared overnight 19th, 24th May respectively after rainy and stormy nights. Last Blyth's reed warbler at Bhombai 25th May. One pair quaker babblers for 1st time ever near 'Latifia' 12-19 May."

Salim Ali
27.5.1943

"The first attempt to catch birds with a mist net ended disastrously. Between all yesterday (15 Nov), and upto 2 pm today (16 Nov) only 3 birds were caught *i.e.* 1 spotted babbler, 1 grey drongo, 1 Blyth's reed warbler. 1st and 3rd were ringed. No. 2 got away after much fighting and drawing blood. With a number of nets and enthusiastic netters I am sure some very useful work could be done here in the intervals between eating and sleeping."

Salim Ali
16.XI.1950

Apart from looking through old records, I had a few thrilling encounters in the field. On 19 Nov I saw a couple of ashy swallow shrikes (*Artamus fuscus*) on a telegraph wire near the pond. These birds which were seen in large flocks a decade ago have become rather rare.

But the sight of the Millennium on the same day was of the whitebellied fishing (sea) eagle. I was walking on the beach homewards, when for some inexplicable reason I turned round and within 50 metres I saw this eagle with outstretched wings 'sailing' westwards towards the sea. There was a fairly strong breeze and the bird heading it was able to advance without a single flap of the wings or seemingly no movement at all until it covered the distance of about 1/2 a furlong. When it reached the edge of the ocean (it was ebb tide), it banked steeply on the right, making a ninety degree turn more elegantly than any aircraft can do. But within 5 seconds it did an about turn (as gull-billed terns do regularly), dropped like a stone, caught its prey in its talons and flapped away to land on a rock in the water, too far away for me to see what it had caught. But from its subsequent actions – holding the prey in its claws, bending down, tearing the victim to pieces with jerks, I thought it could be one of the larger plovers. I have seldom seen a more arresting sight. I watched the scene for 20 minutes until the eagle had finished its meal. Then it walked into a pool, washed its beak, and flew away southwards towards Alibag. The nesting season is from October to June, and we heard these birds on a number of occasions calling with their special far reaching kenk – kenk – kenk – kenk.

Wishing all our Readers a very Happy & Prosperous Millennium Year 2000

Another interesting sight was of a common grey hornbill family (*Tockus birostris*), the one with a casque on its bill. There were two adults and two young ones, which we think had nested in a very suitable hollow in a jamun tree. According to the syce, these birds often come and have a mud bath near the stables. Is this a well known fact, about hornbills cleaning themselves in this fashion?

From My Bookshelf

It is a great pleasure to look through books which we have read long ago and stacked away collecting dust. In the process of dusting them I came across Himalayan and Kashmiri Birds (1923). The author Douglas Dewar writes in the preface : "Paradoxical though it may sound, the value of this book lies largely in its omissions! If this key had included all the birds of Kashmir and the Himalayas, it would have bewildered the user by its complexity, and so failed in its object." This is what I feel about some of the checklists which I receive for the Newsletter. Omitting some species which can be taken for granted and describing a few special ones in greater detail, morphologically, ecologically and aesthetically, would make the piece more enjoyable and educative. Even in describing birds, too many minor details are not always helpful. We must describe the "wood", not the individual tree. This is how Douglas Dewar describes the white-capped redstart : "A feathered exquisite. A snow-white cap; remainder of head, whole neck, breast, wings and upper back, rich velvety black. Tail, rump and abdomen bright chestnut red, so that as the bird leaps from a boulder in midstream into the air, it looks as though it were on fire." In these few words the habitat of the bird also is vividly indicated.

Richard Fitter's Contribution

I was late in requesting Richard to contribute for our 40th Anniversary number, but here is what he sent. For newcomers I would like to say that Richard, for many years Honorary Secretary and then Vice President of the Fauna & Flora Preservation Society of London, has been the author of several books on birds and wild flowers, and has been responsible for many conservation projects worldwide, including Operation Oryx.

My Best Birdwatching Experience

By far the most astonishing birdwatching experience I ever had was on VE Day + 1, May 9, 1945, the day after the end of the war in Europe. John Parminder and I had decided to celebrate it by going down to the marshes on the south side of the Thames estuary east of London, a favoured pre-war birdwatching site. We were astounded to be rewarded with the sight of two black-winged stilts, a bird which neither of us had ever seen, and which had been a very rare pre-war visitor. Like most people who see stilts for the first time, we could not believe how long their legs were, and the experience enabled me to be sure that Richard Richardson, the artist for my Pocket Guide to British Birds, painted the legs long enough.

We found out later that there had been a minor invasion of England by stilts that year, because the Dutch had opened their flood-gates to foil the Germans, so that the stilts were driven away from their breeding grounds in the Netherlands. Altogether at least ten pairs were recorded in England, two of which bred successfully at Nottingham sewage farm in the Midlands.

Richard Fitter,Drifts,Chinnor Hill, Chinnor, Oxon, England

Birdwatching in New Forest, Dehra Dun

DR. JOSEPH GEORGE, 100, 5A Cross Road, HIG Colony, RMV II Stage, Bangalore 560 094

New Forest, the campus of Forest Research Institute in Dehra Dun, UP was a good place to begin watching birds in the mid-1940s. Birds of the plains mingle there with birds of the Himalayas. Some of the sights and sounds still fresh in my memory from those early days are goldfinches on thistles, a flock of minivets flitting over some shrubbery hardly one metre above the ground, the laughter of white-crested laughing thrushes, and the penetrating song of the whistling thrush before sunrise. Bird life on the campus was so rich that in one year over 100 species were seen in or flying over a half hectare garden.

A flock of jungle babblers roosted on a conifer tree in this garden. The birds preferred a fairly open location but if it rained continuously for a few nights, they would move to another tree with denser foliage. After the rains stopped it would take them a few days again to return to the preferred location. This flock fostered one or sometimes two young pied crested cuckoos in most seasons. The cuckoos would roost by themselves on an adjacent branch to the foster parents, but never with them.

The garden had no nesting sites for hole nesters. Magpie robin, blackheaded and common mynas, house and yellow-throated sparrows and fivestriped palm squirrel nested in bamboo nestboxes put up on the young trees in the garden. It was amazing how blackheaded mynas could turn around in bamboo only 7.5 cm in internal diameter, in which they nested. Rollers showed interest in the nestboxes, but common mynas proved troublesome to them. Magpie robins always held their ground against the mynas. Observations made in one nesting season on 54 nestboxes of bamboo in New Forest are recorded in *Indian Forester*, 1958, Vol. 84, pp.687-692.

Bamboo is too tough a material for barbets to penetrate. So a 5 cm hole was cut in the wall of an internode of bamboo, the hole plugged with soft wood and the box put up on a tree. Green barbets cut open the plug but did not nest in the box. A note on this nestbox has been published in NLBW.

Hoopoes readily nested in an internode of bamboo with a hole in the septum (partition wall between nodes) at one end, placed horizontally and framed with bricks over a wall under the eaves of the house in the garden. The bamboo had a somewhat rectangular section. Whether a cylindrical bamboo would have been acceptable to the hoopoes and whether the brick framing was necessary are interesting questions. On the other hand the bamboo in the above nest site was probably quite superfluous !

A block of wood with a bottle shaped cavity scooped out of it and fixed to the ceiling of the garage was taken by house swifts. The open empty garage probably suggested a cave to the high flying swifts who, on coming down to investigate, would have seen the nestbox intended for redrumped swallows. It was always thrilling to watch the nesting swifts dive from great heights and shoot up to the nestbox in a graceful parabola. Swallows took such nestboxes installed elsewhere in New Forest.

Well made nestboxes of wood put up 15 years later to attract birds to a newly planted garden in Bangalore were all stolen !

An astonishing nesting site for a pair of purple sunbirds in New Forest was a chain attached to a flushing cistern in a bathroom. I was at the washbasin in the bathroom when I heard sunbirds behind me. Turning round, I saw the pair of purple sunbirds flying away from the chain. Seated comfortably in the bedroom with the door to the bathroom ajar I could watch the female sunbird construct her nest over a period of five days. After building a solid cone of the usual materials, attached to the chain, the bird plunged her head and shoulders into the middle of it to make a large hole through it. I remember my heart pounding when I grasped the significance of this action. What a simple method to make a hanging pouch ! Once the hole was made, the bird got into it and shook the bottom down to form the pouch. The hole to the rear was also closed. Detailed description of nest construction is given in *JBNHS*, 1958, Vol. 55, pp.420-428.

Large numbers of purple sunbirds nested in New Forest. Most of the nests were so oriented that the sitting sunbird faced the setting sun.

Another bird that seemed to prefer facing west was a rufousbacked shrike while roosting. Only one individual was observed for about ten nights roosting in a thorny *Rubus* bush about two metres above the ground. Every night the bird faced west although it had a choice of perches for roosting.

The greater part of New Forest extending to some 375 hectares could be described as a parkland. The distribution of magpie robins and black drongos in this area one summer was mapped by listening to their predawn song and calls respectively. Inspection during the day showed the presence of female magpie robins along with males in several of the sites where their song was heard before dawn. However all the sites were not inspected and it is not certain that all the males were paired. No attempt was made to ascertain whether each calling drongo represented a pair or not. The number of magpie robins heard before dawn was around 90, that is one bird in about four hectares. About the same number of black drongos were also heard calling before dawn.

The delayed reaction of babblers to changes in weather has been mentioned. The Himalayan whistling thrush was observed to be slow in recognising the progressive lengthening of the day after the winter solstice. The wake up call and song of the bird was heard about 20 minutes before sunrise, except when the sky was overcast, throughout November and till about December 22. That is, the call was heard later and later in the morning as sunrise became later. Then when sunrise became progressively earlier after the solstice, the thrush did not immediately respond to it. The interval between the bird's call and sunrise narrowed steadily, reached a minimum of about ten minutes and then slowly widened to the earlier 20 minutes by about January 15. It continued like that through February, but as the date for the bird's departure to the hills approached, the call was heard 30 minutes or more before sunrise.

Changes in the avifauna of New Forest with the changing seasons were quite striking. A count of the white wagtails seen on either side of the road on my way to work in the mornings showed that their number was maximum in spring and autumn suggesting that New Forest is on their migration route. (*Indian Forester*, 1961, Vol. 87, pp.572-575). Data for black drongos pointed to their status as partial migrants.

Do goldfinches visit New Forest now, I wonder. There is probably no room for thistles.

The Making of a Birdwatcher

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Belated though this manuscript is, for possible publication in the 40th Anniversary Issue of the Newsletter, it is my fond hope that it may be carried sometime later as the import of the item may have some impact on novice birdwatchers, who besides being flummoxed by the shapes, sizes, hues and ethology of birds, often find the scientific terminologies, trinomials and checklists absolutely demoralising. My initiation into the avifaunal world came about through unusual events that transpired about 15 years ago.

Moving into my just bought new tile-roofed home in the rain drenched city on the west coast, Mangalore, my eye caught sight of an ugly mass of bric-a-brac that I found

suspended from the door post just overhead. Closer observation, revealed it to be a nest of a kind, with two chicks. Bidding my family to leave the nest alone, I made a quick exit from the scene to my institute. Ministering to reluctant medical students in the formalin infused dissection hall, appeared a better option than hanging around a new home, with cement, paint, carpenters and masons raising dust and decibel. Returning for lunch, I noticed the dangling nest was missing. All questions on the mysterious disappearance, were answered, by all, masons and labour included, by a shake of their heads, and queer glances askance, the look signifying unspoken comments on my strange new love for birds. After the lot had repaired for their break, I sat down in the open verandah, when I noticed a tiny bird, chattering and muttering, flying to and fro. The mother bird! Agitated and alarmed. The sorties of the bird, appeared to revolve around a particular pillar at the northeast corner of the verandah. I checked the spot, where the bird had hovered again and again, even peering between the potted plants and crotons. The bird, however was adamant. It persisted, twittering and chirping, at that spot. It was then that I noticed the carpenter's tool bag. A cloth sack, tied at its mouth, standing against the pillar. With growing doubt, and trepidation, I opened the sack. Inside was a pink polythene disposable plastic bag, amidst awls, adzes and hammers. In this plastic pouch, stuffed, was the nest. I quickly retrieved the contents, finding one dead chick, and another barely alive. Much to the elation and euphoria of the mother hen, I carefully cupped the bundle of feathers in my palm, walked up to the compound wall, and released the ready-to-fly fledgling. Both baby and mother, hopped away into the thickets and shrubbery beyond.

Two things stood out in the cycle of events. One, the persistence with which the mother bird had indicated the site of the stolen nest to me, and the other, the confidence she had, in my interpreting her signals. Fascinated by bird ethology, I embarked on a serious study of birds, a pastime which over the years has developed into a passion; with over ten write-ups in the Newsletter, a book on Wildlife biology, convening of a workshop on avifauna, serving as State representative in the WWF-Karnataka, becoming life-member of the Ornithological Society of India, conducting nature camps for children at Bandipur and Muthodi, writing a checklist of Mangalore birds ... and to top it all, having the honour of being selected, after a series of interviews following an all-India advertisement, as the Executive Director of the Bombay Natural History Society, after Mr. J.C. Daniel's retirement (a post I passed up for personal reasons) and writing more than 56 articles on birds in newspapers!

Who would have guessed that a small purple sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) would have opened so many doors, to so many pursuits and so many new friends. By the way, did I mention that the sunbird's chicks also put me into bird embryology, a science in which I completed my (Master of Surgery degree) Dissertation, and for which I received the Padmashri TMA Pai Gold Medal for original research....

Last evening, when I released an adult barn owl, handed over to me by a city resident, I felt a strange thrill ... that in some small way, I am giving back to nature, its own gene pool, besides schooling hundreds of cityfolk on the baselessness of their sinister theories on owls as harbingers of the evil eye. I also thank the Newsletter for giving hobby birders like me, a chance to share experience and knowledge, not in scientific jargon and legalese, but in prose and common tongue. After all, the mother purple sunbird, did speak to me, not in any tongue I knew, but in universal language ... common system of communication that conveys, grief, sorrow, elation and alarm, decipherable to all living beings and creations.

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Presentation Features of Maimed Birds

In the decade since the WWF-India State Committee along with the Rotary Club, conducted a 'Workshop on Avifauna' in Mangalore, awareness of the need to conserve habitat and foster birdwatching, have grown quite remarkably. The southwest coast, though handicapped by the annual four month deluge during the monsoons, is fairly fecund in its bird

life. A spin-off from the workshop has been the regular frequency with which distress phone calls are made to me, on 'how-to' and 'what-to-do' with a mobbed bird or two that has been found here and there, within and even outside the city. Often too, maimed, orphaned or trapped birds are brought home, for rehabilitation or nursing. A good percentage of such 'patients' are released on recovery. In the period cited, some odd modes of presentations of the avian patients, have intrigued me. A cinnamon bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*), barely alive, that crashed into a hostel window pane, during a gusty monsoon night, a fully decapitated Indian robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*), a dog-maimed green barbet (*Megalaima zeylanica*) a lame fledgeling pariah kite (*Milvus migrans*), a cat-bitten Indian pitta (*Pitta brachyura*), a brown hawk owl (*Ninox scutulata*) that crashed into a motorcyclist's helmet - needless to add, all the aforementioned birds were either dead or died soon after handing over. The most common bird brought to me was the blue rock pigeon (*Columba livia*), most often with broken wing(s) through flying into ceiling fan blades. I am indebted to many readers of the Newsletter for educating me on the nuances of feeding and treatment of injured birds (in response to an earlier write-up of mine on the Mangalore mission).

Sixty two birds have been sent to me, of which 41 flew away after medical intervention and rehabilitation. In my series, owls, kites and crows recovered well, but pigeons, bulbuls and coppersmith barbets had high mortality rates.

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Of Kingfishers and Wells

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Prof Arunachalam Kumar's observations on kingfisher hunting in well (NLBW Vol. 39(4) July/August 1999) finally prompt me to write what I had been thinking of doing for the past one year. Prof. Kumar lives about 54 km from the town where I live, Karkala, and I am sure he may be able to observe and confirm what I am going to write here.

Economic progress and modernisation have a definite adverse effect on the environment around us. While it is reaching alarming proportions in various degrees in diverse habitats leading to disappearance or even local extinction of species, there are also subtle yet significant changes taking place which need not necessarily be for the worse. Certain species of animals and plants quickly adapt themselves to changing environment. I would like to share my observations on kingfishers (three spp) in my town.

My ancestral house is on the bank of a small irrigation tank called Anekere, which hosts, at any given time, over 30 species of birds, many of them breeding visitors. The tank is situated at the entrance of the town and is surrounded by orchards, coconut groves and paddyfields on one side and a busy main road on the other.

The tank has been a regular hunting ground for common, whitebreasted and storkbilled kingfishers and these could be seen throughout the year. However, I had been unable to locate their nests. They obviously bred somewhere nearby – as evidenced from the fledged young being fed on wing by the parents.

Last year in May I noticed a common kingfisher perched on the draw bar of one of the two wells in my backyard. It had a small fish in its beak. As I watched it for a while from a little distance away, it suddenly dived into the well. When I went to the well and peered over, the bird was nowhere to be seen. I was a bit apprehensive about its safety, but was eventually delighted to see it emerge from a hole on the side of the well about 1.5 m from ground level. Obviously it had a nest there and was feeding the young. I kept a watch on this nest and eventually had the satisfaction of seeing three young successfully emerge from the nest and clear out of the well. Since there were no dead chicks floating in the well water, it was apparent that there were no mishaps to this brood.

While watching the above nest I also discovered that another pair had been nesting in our second well which is about 25 m from the first one. Though I did not actually see the emergence of any brood, I am sure they too were successful, as I did not see any dead chicks in that well.

To my further delight the pair (was it the same?) at the first well nested again two months later and I could see the pair incubating in turns. Unfortunately this time heavy monsoon had set in and the rising well water came up much above the nest and as a consequence the eggs/chicks perhaps got drowned.

I made a survey of nearby wells in a radius of about 2-3 km and was rewarded by the discovery of a pair of storkbilled kingfishers nesting in the well in the nearby Mosque; a pair of whitebreasted kingfishers nesting in another well belonging to a private house not far away. I then spread the word in the neighbourhood asking anyone to inform me if they noticed any birds visiting their wells. Four people reported seeing kingfishers (they were quite familiar about the birds). We closely examined the wells and found the nest holes in each of them. Though I personally did not see it, my informants assured me that the birds were seen frequently flying into the wells. From their description I could gather that they were all whitebreasted kingfishers. So, our tally of kingfishers nesting in wells in that month (May) was – two pairs of common, one

pair of storkbilled and five pairs of whitebreasted within 2 km radius of the tank!

We did not actually see if any of these hunted in the wells at all, but as plenty of food was available in the tank as well as nearby paddy fields and wetlands, the birds perhaps had no need to feed on any fish in the wells.

What made these birds prefer nesting in the wells? Once again I made a reconnaissance of the nesting wells. All the wells seem to have one common factor – all of them had been fitted with electric immersible pumps for lifting water for domestic use. It was apparent that these days hardly anyone used the traditional pulley-and-rope method to draw well water and any disturbance at wells seems to have been minimised except for occasional repair and maintenance of the pumps. The kingfishers perhaps learnt the advantage of safety as well as the soft and moisturised mud walls of the well to tunnel their nests.

This could be a stray phenomenon restricted to one case/ area only. On the other hand, it may be the case when similar ecological conditions prevail anywhere else. Again, it may also lead to more questions by discerning ornithologists. A close watch over a period of time may show some definite pattern in kingfisher behaviour, if any.

Birds of Kihim - Dr. Salim Ali's Trail Revisited

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I was invited by the Futehallys to visit them in Kihim on 7th November 1999. Kihim, with its long coastline studded with casurina is about 17 km., as the crow flies, from the Gateway of India, Mumbai. However, it is about 150 km., by road. I decided to take the much shorter waterway. The boat journey from the Gateway to Mandwa and then the bus journey from Mandwa to Chondi were smooth and scenic. From Chondi, Murad Manzil is three kilometers which I covered by the "ubiquitous" auto rickshaw. I had started at 7:45 hr. from the Gateway and reached Kihim beach at 9:30 hr.

Mr. Futehally has often written about his birding experiences at this place, which also happens to be the location where the late Dr. Salim Ali conducted his initial bird research on weaver birds.

After a customary warm reception by Mrs. Laeeq, Mr Futehally and I headed for the trail. The birdlife in the region back in the fifties and sixties, I was told, was admirable owing to the combination of a tropical, moist and semi-evergreen forest, a vast undisturbed beach and thick mangrove swamps. Although, I knew that it would be foolish to expect to see it in its past glory, I allowed my optimism to override any reservations I had. In spite of the fact that the trail runs alongside a series of privately owned beach houses, it is still surprisingly lush and tranquil. Our trail commenced with the sighting of a black-naped monarch (black-naped blue flycatcher) searching for insects in the giant wood spider's web high up in a *Ficus bengalensis*. The coppersmith with its monotonous "*puk-puk-puk*" and the golden oriole with a much harsher "chrrrea" seemed to herald the fruiting of the banyan tree, which would provide them with vital nutrients throughout winter. The black drongo, an egoistic bird, tried its best to make its presence felt with a persistent "switch pik-pik". It too made the most of the banyan, probably picking tiny insects (wasps?) that come to lay their eggs in the ripened fruits.

The dark under-story naturally had its share of avian residents - spotted doves, red vented & red whiskered bulbuls, Eurasian chiffchaff and the common tailor bird. As we tried to trace the inconspicuous chiffchaff in the dense undergrowth, the "swich-swich" of an Asian paradise flycatcher drew our attention to the neighbouring *Artocarpus heterophyllus*. It wasn't long before the short scurrying flights of this deft insect hunter led us to its source. A single long white tail feather on this juvenile male indicated that the bird was about to step into adulthood. It would soon exuviate its rufous coloured plumage for a milky-white coat that will decorate it for life. The adult male paradise flycatcher is undisputedly one of the most impressive of Indian birds !

Further ahead Mr. Futehally pointed to a spot where he often saw the white-throated ground thrush and though he lamented the possible disappearance of this bird from Kihim, I was lucky to point out one later in the day. The sharp unmistakable "chichee" of the common (small blue) kingfisher as it jetted past us into the thick bamboo clump bordering a tiny man-made pond enabled us to locate it. Later, we saw the bird perched a few feet above the water surface. A placid Indian pond heron also watched this vibrant fisherman from the opposite bank, as it patiently waited for unwary fish to rise to the surface for a gulp of air.

High above the pond was a flock of barn (common) swallows surveying the air for highflying insects that rise with the afternoon heat. They seemed to enjoy the tropical sun after a long, laborious journey from the chilling temperate zones of the north. Within no time, the swallows were replaced by a bunch of resident Asian palm swifts possibly irritated, for having to accommodate the ever-increasing migrant swallow populations !

Just then, an unusual rumbling sound accompanied by a foul odor affected our senses. The sound emanated from an illicit brewery that was set up near the pond. The foul smelling effluent was being dumped into the pond causing acute eutrophication. What an irony - the algae thrives on high levels of organic waste but in the bargain chokes life out of the aquatic fauna, thereby depleting the very food source on which the birds survive. It is sad but true that such distilleries have

mushroomed within many wildlife reserves in Maharashtra, providing easy money to the poor, who neither know nor care about the countless lives it affects, both human and animal alike !

Disgusted and helpless, we moved-on. A pair of purple-rumped sunbirds with their sorties for nectar and pollen was a welcome sight. Soon we reached the fringe of the forest and into the mangroves, which supported its own characteristic birdlife. Shoals of tiny fish and crabs converge in these amphibious forests to forage on the nutritious soup of decaying leaves. Green sandpipers, red wattled lapwings, cattle and little egrets in turn were seen feasting on this abundant fauna. A solitary black-shouldered (black-winged) kite was spotted amongst a few boisterous black (pariah) kites that seemed to be involved in a mock combat. The "trilling" calls of the (little) green bee-eaters filled the air.

We had already walked more than an hour and it was time for us to return. We reached a patch of ground engulfed in *Lantana camara* and *Salvadora persica*. While we flushed out a flock of chestnut-tailed (grey-headed) myna from within the *Lantana* shrub, the bold house sparrows continued their assault on this juicy delicacy. Then we were on the beach to try our luck at some waders that visit the western shores of India during this time of the year. We were welcomed by a flock of twelve red shanks that were surprisingly lazing around. In contrast a solitary common sandpiper capitalized on the receding tide by pecking incessantly at tiny invertebrates. Just then, my eyes lit-up at the sight of that most elegant bird of prey - the white-bellied fish (sea) eagle effortlessly flying past the *Casuarina* trees. The huge grey bill and the pied underbody against the deep blue winter sky has left an unforgettable impression. We kept gazing at the sky even after the bird had long vanished. The presence of this tertiary predator (an indicator of the health of our estuaries and seashores) in the area had suddenly raised our spirits and we were more optimistic about the fate of this fragile ecosystem.

Back into the forest, the spell was broken only by the "chirrups" of the common iora busily searching for grubs in a *Mangifera indica*. The calls of the plum-headed (blossom headed) and rose-ringed parakeets echoed in the background. At the 'Manzil', a lovely meal, awaited me, but after the meal I headed straight for the beach for some more bird watching!

It was 14.00 hr. but the beach was as busy as ever. Scores of Kentish plovers, common red shanks and green shanks, Terek and common sandpipers kept me company. Far away to the south, a huge flock of common black headed gulls (more than 150) were enjoying an afternoon siesta. On a closer look, I could also spot some gull-billed as well as little terns sitting alongside their larger cousins. Most surprisingly, I saw a Eurasian hoopoe probing in the wet sand for grubs (probably crabs). On my way back, I also stumbled upon a solitary low-flying ruddy turnstone, which has a somewhat labored flight in comparison to the other shorebirds. By the time I returned Mr. Futehally was ready to take me to the Kihim pond where Dr. Salim Ali had carried out his world famous research on the baya weavers.

The *Acacia arabica* that supported Dr. Ali's bayas has long been chopped. The village men supposedly pay Rs. 80,000/- per annum to the government for allowing them to fish in the pond and therefore treat it as their own property leaving very little room for the birds. The pond was once inhabited by 35 species of birds including both species of jacanas, cotton teals, pied kingfishers, Eurasian marsh harriers, common moorhens, white-breasted waterhens, etc. It is very distressing to see its current state. However, inspite of the pollution and disturbance we were happy to see a white wagtail, couple of red wattled lapwings, a solitary little cormorant and a common kingfisher, perched on a central cement podium that juts out from the water. With all the floating vegetation gone, the birds are compelled to take refuge on man-made structures! Suddenly, a flock of over 100 common swallows appeared on the scene and one by one plunged into the pond for a refreshing bath before the night.

Not far away from the pond, along the tar road, we came across a signboard that read "Spotless Pest Control". In fact, the entire roadway from Mandwa to Kihim had these advertisements. Although it was directed at ridding us of insect pests there synthetic pesticides are a major cause of our ecological problem. After a thoroughly refreshing day I embarked upon the return journey reaching Chondi at 17:30 hr. and the Gateway by 20:00 hr.

Appendix - I

The semi-evergreen forest at Kihim harbors trees like *Tectona grandis, Ficus bengalensis, F. religiosa, F. racemosa, Syzygium cumini, Pongamia pinnata, Thespesia populnea, Bombax malabaricum, Erythrina indica, Mitragyna parvifolia, Adina cordifolia, Schleichera oleosa, Tamarindus indica, Spathodea campanulata, Butea monosperma, Cassia fistula, Grewia tiliaefolia, Holarrhena antidysenterica, Carjota urens, Borassus flabellifer, Acacia arabica, Bamboo* etc., while the seashore is lined with *Casuarina equisetifolia* and *Cocos nucifera*. Some of the shrubs include *Helicteres isora, Capparis sp., Carinya sp., Zizyphus sp., Lantana camara, Salvadora persica* and *Ipomea sp.* among others. *Avicennia sp.* is the main stay as far as the mangroves are concerned.

Appendix II :

The birds seen at Kihim on 7th November 1999 are as follows :

1. Black-rumped flameback *Dinopium benghalense*; 2. Coppersmith barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*; 3. Eurasian hoopoe *Upupa epops*; 4. Indian roller *Coracias benghalensis*; 5. Common kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*; 6. White-throated kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*; 7. Green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*; 8. Asian koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*; 9. Rose-ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*; 10. Plum-headed parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*; 11. Asian palm swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*; 12. Rock pigeon *Columba livia*; 13. Spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis*; 14. Common greenshank *Tringa nebularia*; 15. Common redshank *Tringa totanus*; 16. Ruddy trunstone *Arenaria interpres*; 17. Green sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*; 18. Common sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*; 19. Terek sandpiper *Tringa brevipes*; 20. Kentish plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*; 21. Little ringed plover *Charadrius dubius*; 22. Red-wattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus*; 23. Great black-headed gull *Larus ichthyaetus*;

24. Common black-headed gull *Larus ridibundus*; 25. Gull-billed tern *Sterna nilotica*; 26. Little tern *Sterna albifrons*; 27. Black-shouldered kite *Elanus caeruleus*; 28. Black kite *Milvus migrans*; 29. Brahminy kite *Haliastur indus*; 30. White-bellied fish-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*; 31. Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*; 32. Little egret *Egretta garzetta*; 33. Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*; 34. Indian pond heron *Ardeola grayii*; 35. Western reef egret *Egretta gularis*; 36. Golden-fronted leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons*; 37. House crow *Corvus splendens*; 38. Large-billed crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*; 39. Eurasian golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus*; 40. Black-headed oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*; 41. Black drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*; 42. Asian paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*; 43. Common iora *Aegithina tiphia*; 44. White-throated ground thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanotus*; 45. Verditer flycatcher *Muscicapa thalassina*; 46. Tickell's blue flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae*; 47. Black-naped monarch *Hypothymis azurea*; 48. Indian robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*; 49. Chestnut-tailed starling *Sturnus malabaricum*; 50. Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*; 51. Jungle myna *Acridotheres fuscus*; 52. Barn swallow *Hirundo rustica*; 53. Red rumped swallow *Hirundo daurica*; 54. Red-whiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*; 55. Red-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*; 56. Ashy prinia *Prinia socialis*; 57. Common tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*; 58. Eurasian chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*; 59. Greenish warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*; 60. Purple-rumped sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica*; 61. House sparrow *Passer domesticus*; 62. White wagtail *Motacilla alba*; 63. Baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus*.

Migratory Birds at Lingambudhi Lake in Mysore

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Water bodies comprising numerous lakes and tanks constitute important habitats for wetland birds all over India. Karnataka state is unique in having thousands of irrigation tanks, the man-made reservoirs or lakes in order to conserve rain water. Something like 43,000 tanks or lakes offer feeding and resting areas for many species of wetland birds - both resident as well as migratory. Lingambudhi lake situated in the outskirts of Mysore was built a hundred and fifty seven years ago (1842) by the Mysore Wodeyars for irrigating lands around the village Lingambudhi Palya .

We have been surveying the birds in this lake for the last ten years. Our observations show that it is home to at least 276 species of birds including the important winter visitors. Since the lake was under threat as the city expanded, concerned birdwatchers and environmentalists, with the help of the forest department, were able to improve the habitat and, by creating small islands surrounded by water, provide a safe place for winter ducks. The trees planted on these islands (*Acacia, Sesbania*) provide roosting sites for resident water birds like cormorants, storks, herons and egrets. It is now a breathtaking sight to observe wintering long-distance migrants comprising at least 121 species representing 29 families (Table 1). The migratory birds start arriving as early as August comprising mainly waders, followed by ducks in September and October, their numbers peaking in December and January. On an average one can count upto 5,000 ducks representing ten species and 600 waders of 26 species. We have counted up to 25,000 ducks (JAN '98) and 4,000 waders (MAR'98) on a single day. It is a grand spectacle to watch the ducks descending on the lake and taking off *en masse*.

The distribution of various species of ducks, in the lake shows a distinct pattern of association, the shovelers, garganeys and wigeons preferring the shallow waters while the pochards are found in the deep waters. The waders are confined to the mudflats, fringes of the lake and the adjoining paddy fields. As waterfowl count decreases with the advancing summer, the number of waders increase dramatically. During the dry summer season and when there is inadequate rains of the monsoon, the entire lake transforms itself into a large mudflat attracting waders. Of the 26 species of waders recorded here, important and rare ones include the Terek sandpiper, the ruddy turnstone, the pied avocet and the common ringed plover. When such a wonderful array of birds congregate, raptors complete the picture of the seasonal spectacle. Out of the 25 species of raptors recorded, 11 are winter visitors. Rare sightings include that of the greater spotted eagle, the hen harrier and the peregrine falcon. Warblers are confined to the fringes where reed beds grow adjoining the paddy fields and the grassy edges. 21 species of warblers have been recorded from here, 16 being winter visitors including the Pallas' grasshopper warbler, a rare sighting (Table 1). A large number of egrets (up to 3000) mynas and rosy pastors (up to 10000) regularly utilize the lands for roosting. Other significant records from the lake include the greater flamingo, Indian reef heron, the black capped kingfisher, the great black headed gull, the little tern, the common tern, the short-eared owl and the wryneck.. This tank till recently was outside the city limits of Mysore, but with the expansion of the city, is now a part of the suburbs and consequently faces the twin threats of pollution and drying up due to loss of catchment areas. Birdwatchers and environmentalists of Mysore have been pressing the authorities to protect the lake from contamination by sewage. Further, there has been a move to construct a 'ringroad' to pass through the lake, which if allowed, is a death knell for our guests from far-away lands that winter here. This wonderful spot cries for attention and needs to be conserved. It could serve as a great birding site for city dwellers as well as for eager birders.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mr. U. N. Ravikumar, who has been in the forefront in the fight to save the lake. We would also like to express our gratitude to Mr. K.B. Sadanand, Mr. Guruprasad

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Table 1

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS WINTERING AT OR PASSING THROUGH LINGAMBUDHI LAKE

C - Common; O - Occasional; R - Rare; V - Vagrant; P - Passage migrant.

Sl No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
FAMILY : DENDROCYGNIDAE (TREE - DUCKS)			
1.	Lesser whistling teal	*Dendrocygna javanica*	C
FAMILY : ANATIDAE (DUCKS)			
2.	Cotton teal/ Cotton pygmy-goose	*Nettapus coromandelianus*	O
3.	Garganey / Grey winged teal	*Anas querquedula*	C
4.	Common teal / Green - winged teal	*Anas crecca*	O
5.	Eurasian wigeon	*A. penelope*	O
6.	Gadwall	*A. strepera*	R
7.	Northern shoveler	*A. clypeata*	C
8.	Northern pintail	*A. acuta*	C
9.	Common pochard	*Aythya ferina*	C
10.	Ferruginous pochard	*A. nyroca*	R
FAMILY : PICIDAE (WOODPECKERS)			
11	Eurasian wryneck	*Jynx torquilla*	V
FAMILY : CORACIIDAE (ROLLERS)			
12.	European roller	*Coracias garrulus*	V/P
FAMILY : DACELONIDAE (HALCYON KINGFISHERS)			
13.	Black-capped kingfisher	*Halcyon pileata*	V
FAMILY : MEROPIDAE (BEE-EATERS)			
14.	Chestnut headed bee-eater	*Merops leschenaulti*	O
15.	Blue tailed bee-eater	*M. philippinus*	C
FAMILY : CUCULIDAE (CUCKOOS)			
16.	Indian cuckoo	*Cuculus micropterus*	O
FAMILY : STRIGIDAE (OWLS)			
17.	Short eared owl	*Asio flammeus*	V
FAMILY : RALLIDAE (RAILS, CRAKES)			
18.	Baillon's crake	*Porzana pusilla*	R
FAMILY : SCOLOPACIDAE (SNIPES)			
19.	Common/fantail snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*	O
20.	Pintail snipe	*G. stenura*	C
21.	Jack snipe	*G. media*	R
FAMILY : TRINGIDAE (SANDPIPERS)			
22.	Eurasian curlew	*Numenius arquata*	R
23.	Black-tailed godwit	*Limosa limosa*	O
24.	Spotted redshank	*Tringa erythropus*	V
25.	Common redshank	*T. totanus*	C
26.	Marsh sandpiper	*T. stagnatilis*	C
27.	Common greenshank	*T. nebularia*	C
28.	Green sandpiper	*T. ochropus*	C
29.	Spotted sandpiper	*T. glareola*	C
30.	Terek sandpiper	*T. cinerea / T. terek*	V/P
31.	Common sandpiper	*T. hypoleucos*	C
32.	Ruddy turnstone	*Arenaria interpres*	V
33.	Little stint	*Calidris minuta*	C
34.	Temminck's stint	*C. temminckii*	C
35.	Curlew-sandpiper	*C. ferruginea*	O/P
36.	Ruff	*Philomachus pugnax*	O
FAMILY : ROTSRATULIDAE (PAINTED SNIPE)			
37.	Greater painted snipe	*Rostratula benghalensis*	O
FAMILY : CHARADRIIDAE (PLOVERS)			
38.	Black winged stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	C
39.	Pied avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*	V
40.	Grey plover	*Pluvialis squatarola*	V
41.	Pacific golden plover	*Pluvialis dominica*	O
42.	Common ringed plover	*Charadrius hiaticula*	V
43.	Little ringed plover	*C. dubius*	C
44.	Kentish plover	*C. alexandrinus*	C
45.	Mongolian plover/ Lesser sand plover	*C. mongolus*	R/P
FAMILY : GLAREOLIDAE (PRATINCOLES)			
46.	Small pratincole	*Glareola lactea*	V
FAMILY : LARIDAE (GULLS, TERNS)			
47.	Great black-headed gull	*Larus ichthyaetus*	V
48.	Brown headed gull	*L. brunnicephalus*	O
49.	Black headed gull	*L. ridibundus*	R
50.	Whiskered tern	*Childonias hybrida*	C
51.	Gull billed tern	*Sterna nilotica*	O
52.	River tern	*S. aurantia*	C
53.	Common tern	*S. hirundo*	V
54.	Blackbellied tern	*S. acuticauda*	C
55.	Little tern	*S. albifrons*	V
FAMILY : ACCIPITRIDAE (HAWKS, EAGLES, VULTURES)			
56.	Long-legged buzzard	*Buteo rufinus*	R
57.	Bonelli's eagle	*Hieraaetus fasciatus*	V
58.	Booted hawk eagle	*Hieraaetus pennatus*	O
59.	Greater spotted eagle	*Aquila clanga*	O
60.	Black eagle	*Ictinaetus malayensis*	V
61.	Hen harrier/ Northern harrier	*Circus cyaneus*	V
62.	Pale harrier / Pallid harrier	*C. macrourus*	O
63.	Western marsh-harrier	*C. aeruginosus*	C
64.	Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*	R
FAMILY : FALCONIDAE (FALCONS)			
65.	Peregrine falcon	*Falco peregrinoides / F. peregrinus*	V
66.	Kestrel	*F. tinnunculus*	O
FAMILY : ARDEIDAE (HERONS, EGRETS)			
67.	Indian reef heron/ Western reef-egret	*Egretta gularis*	V
68.	Yellow bittern	*Ixobrychus sinensis*	O
69.	Chestnut bittern	*I. cinnamomeus*	R
FAMILY : PHOENICOPTERIDAE (FLAMINGOS)			
70.	Greater flamingo	*Phoenicopterus roseus*	V
FAMILY : THRESKIORNITHIDAE (IBISES, SPOONBILLS)			
71.	Glossy ibis	*Pseudibis falcinellus*	O
72.	Eurasian spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*	C
FAMILY : CICONIIDAE (STORKS)			
73.	Asian openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	R
74.	Woollynecked (Whitenecked) stork	*Ciconia episcopus*	O
FAMILY : PITTIDAE (PITTAS)			
75.	Indian pitta	*Pitta brachyura*	R
FAMILY : LANIIDAE (SHRIKES)			
76.	Brown shrike	*Lanius cristatus*	C
FAMILY : CORVIDAE (CROWS, DRONGOS, ORIOLES)			
77.	Ashy swallow-shrike	*Artamus fuscus*	O
78.	Eurasian golden oriole	*Oriolus oriolus kundoo*	C
79.	Rosy minivet	*Pericrocotus roseus*	V

80.	Black drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	C
81.	White bellied drongo	*D. caerulescens*	R
82.	Grey / ashy drongo	*D. leucophaeus*	R
83.	Asian paradise flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*	O
FAMILY : MUSCICAPIDAE (THRUSHES, FLYCATCHERS, CHATS)			
84.	Asian brown flycatcher	*Muscicapa latirostris / M. dauurica*	C
85.	Brown breasted flycatcher	*M. muttui*	V/P
86.	Red-breasted flycatcher	*M. parva*	O
87.	Blue throat	*Erithacus svecicus*	O
88.	Black redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros rufiventris*	R
89.	Siberian stonechat/ Collared bushchat	*Saxicola torquata/ S.maura*	R
90.	Black bird	*Turdus merula*	V
FAMILY : STURNIDAE (STARLINGS)			
91.	a) Chestnut tailed starling / Grey headed myna	*Sturnus malabaricus malabaricus*	C
	b) White headed Race of (a)	*S. malabaricus blythi*	R
92.	Brahminy starling	*S. pagodarum*	C
93.	Rosy starling	*S. roseus*	C
FAMILY : HIRUNDINIDAE (SWALLOWS)			
94.	Barn swallow / common swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	C
95.	Wire tailed swallow	*H. smithii*	O
96.	Striated swallow / Red-rumped swallow	*H. daurica*	C
97.	House martin	*Delichon urbica*	V
98.	Streak throated swallow / Indian cliff swallow	*H. fluvicola*	V
FAMILY: SYLVIIDAE (WARBLERS)			
99.	Franklin's wren-warbler	*Prinia hodgsonii*	O
100.	Grasshopper warbler	*Locustella naevia*	O
101.	Pallas' grasshopper warbler/ Pallas' warbler	*L. certhiola*	V
102.	Thickbilled warbler	*Acrocephalus aedon*	O
103.	Indian great reed warbler / Clamorous reed-warbler	*A. stentoreus*	C
104.	Blyth's reed warbler	*A. dumetorum*	C
105.	Paddy field warbler	*A. agricola*	O
106.	Booted warbler	*Hippolais caligata*	C
107.	Orphean warbler	*Sylvia hortensis*	R
108.	Lesser white throat	*S. curruca* (i)*althea* (ii) *minula*	C
109.	Eurasian chiff-chaff / Brown leaf warbler	*Phylloscopus collybita*	O
110.	Tickell's leaf warbler	*P. affinis*	R
111.	Plain leaf warbler / Inornate warbler	*P. inornatus*	C
112.	Olivaceous leaf warbler / Sulphurbellied warbler	*P. griseolus*	O
113.	Dull green leaf warbler / Greenish warbler	*P. occipitalis*	C
FAMILY : PASSERIDAE			
114.	White wagtail / Pied wagtail	*Motacilla alba dukhunensis*	R
115.	Yellowheaded wagtail / Citrine wagtail	*M. citreola*	R
116.	Yellow wagtail	*M. flava*	
	(a) Blackheaded race	*M. flava melanogrisea*	O
	(b) Blueheaded race	*M. flava beema*	C
	(c) Greyheaded race	*M. flava thunbergi*	C
117.	Grey wagtail	*M. cinerea*	C
118.	Indian tree pipit / Olive-backed pipit	*Anthus hodgsoni*	R
119.	Richard's pipit	*A. novaeseelandiae richardi*	R
120.	Brown rock pipit / Large-billed pipit	*A. similis*	O
121.	Tawny pipit	*A. campestris*	O
122.	Common rosefinch	*Carpodacus erythrinus*	R

Resident Wetland Birds at Lingambudhi Lake

Sl. No.	Common name	Scientific Name	Status
FAMILY : ANATIDAE (DUCKS)			
01.	Spotbilled duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	C
FAMILY : ALCEDINIDAE (KINGFISHERS)			
02.	Common kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	C
FAMILY : DACELONIDAE (HALCYON KINGFISHERS)			
03.	White breasted / White throated kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	C
FAMILY : CERYLIDAE (RED KINGFISHERS)			
04.	Pied kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	C
FAMILY : RALLIIDAE (RAILS, CRAKES, COOTS)			
05.	Blue breasted banded Rail / Slatyheaded rail	*Rallus striatus*	R
06.	Ruddy / ruddy breasted crake	*Porzana fusca*	C
07.	Brown crake	*Amaurornis akool*	O
08.	White breasted water hen	*A. phoenicurus*	C
09.	Common moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	C
10.	Purple moorhen / Purple swamp hen	*Porphyrio porphyrio*	C
11.	Common coot	*Fulica atra*	C
FAMILY : JACANIDAE (JACANAS)			
12.	Pheasant-tailed jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	C
13.	Bronze-winged jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	O
FAMILY : ANHINGIDAE (DARTERS)			
14.	Oriental darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	C
FAMILY : PHALACROCORACIDAE (CORMORANTS)			
15.	Great cormorant / Large cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	C
16.	Indian cormorant (Indian shag)	*P. fuscicollis*	O
17.	Little cormorant	*P. niger*	C
FAMILY : ARDEIDAE (HERONS, EGRETS)			
18.	Grey heron	*Ardea cinerea*	C
19.	Purple heron	*A. purpurea*	C
20.	Indian pond heron	*Ardeola grayii*	C
21.	Cattle egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	C
22.	Large egret / Great egret	*Ardea alba*	C
23.	Intermediate egret / Smaller egret	*Egretta intermedia*	C
24.	Little egret	*Egretta garzetta*	C
25.	Black-crowned night heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	O
FAMILY : THRESKIORNITHIDAE (IBISES)			
26.	White ibis / Blackheaded ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus / T. aethiopica*	C
FAMILY : PELECANIDAE (PELICANS)			
27.	Spot-billed pelican	*Pelecanus philippensis*	C
FAMILY : CICONIIDAE (STORKS)			
28.	Painted stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	C
FAMILY : CISTICOLIDAE (WREN-WARBLERS)			
29.	Streaked fantail warbler / Zitting cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*	C

Birdwatching from Lalpuri Reservoir to Crissy Field

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My first and only contribution to the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* appeared as a jointly bylined article, written mostly by my co-author KS Lavkumar, published (or should I say cyclostyled) in the May 1963 issue of the Newsletter's Vol.3. In it, we described a late-March outing of amateur birdwatchers from Rajkot City to the nearby Lalpuri Reservoir – during which we observed a variety of waterside birds – both resident and migratory.

It was nearly three years earlier, however, when I first became acquainted with the *Newsletter*. It was during the summer of 1960 when I was in India as an exchange student from Massachusetts and lucky enough to find myself in the generous hospitality of Laeeq and Zafar Futehally, then living in their charming Juhu Lane home in Andheri – the lovely cottage opening into an expansive garden designed by Laeeq to attract all manner of bird life (a setting more recently memorialized in *Tara Lane*, the widely honored first novel by Shama Futehally).

In the summer of 1960 the *Newsletter* was only six months old, the first edition of *About Indian Birds* by Laeeq Futehally and her uncle Salim Ali was fairly new on the bookstore shelves, and, looking back, it seems to me that the combination of these two publications appearing at this moment in the history of India's modern environmental movement represented a signal development in the popular understanding of the utterly indispensable role birds play in the earth's fragile ecosystem. In the introduction to *About Indian Birds*, the authors state: "Birds are an integral part of the whole system of life on this earth. They are necessary in the same way that soil and plants and animals are necessary." For forty years now the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* has faithfully observed that tenet.

I was reminded of the Lalpuri Reservoir outing recently during my daily walk along the San Francisco Bay – along a two mile shoreline stretch from Marina Green to Fort Point at the base of the southern span of the Golden Gate Bridge. For more than a century, this Golden Gate headland has been part of a spectacular piece of heavily forested property occupied by the Presidio of San Francisco – an Army base whose military origins extend back to the days of the Spanish royal land grants. With the end of the Cold War and the shrinkage of the US military, and, in a stroke of enlightened public policy planning, this property recently became the only urban US National Park – on par with Yellowstone and Yosemite – called the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). It's as if the whole of the Malabar Hill peninsula in Bombay had been reserved for centuries – and then transformed into a National Park.

Civic-minded individuals formed the Golden Gate National Parks Association, the official non-profit affiliate of the GGNRA, determined to contribute to the intelligent conversion of the military base to a true preserve for nature and a site for healthy recreation. Progress toward this end has been encouraging.

When I began my walks along that stretch of the Bay a decade or so ago, the footpath route was a mixed blessing. The views of Golden Gate Bridge and across the Bay to Alcatraz and Angel islands and into the distance to Mount Tamalpias were spectacular. But on the land side, my walk was dominated by abandoned acres of concrete and asphalt airport runways – Crissy Field – built for light military planes and flanked by corrugated steel hangers and used until recently only by military helicopters. Toxic runoff from fuels and oils had saturated the soils for decades, the original coastal sand dunes had shrunk to a few yards of sadly neglected shoreline, the wetlands had disappeared under the paving, and migratory birds that had for centuries used the shoreline here for their spring and fall feedings had long since disappeared.

Then, as a result of the Association's work – and its exceptional fundraising efforts – something quite promising began to happen, beginning in September 1998. The Association had already raised $25 million (in private donations) of the $27 million needed, and work commenced to restore the 100-acre plot, remove the asphalt landing strip, raze buildings, clean up the toxic waste, install a 30-acre tidal lagoon, rebuild the sand dunes and replant native grasses and wildflowers. It is to be completed in mid-2000.

For those of us using the walking trail during this construction period (with the workers carefully accommodating us with useable detours whenever the giant earth-moving equipment needed rights-of-way for the restoration project), the transformation has been remarkable. Even more encouraging has been nature's response. With the restoration not even two-thirds finished, the return of more than 60 species of birds has been recorded at the site – about one third of them wetland obligates, the shorebirds, herons, waterfowl, terns and the like. There are the dowitchers, sandpipers and avocets, all making themselves at home probing the black mud shore of the not-yet-completed lagoon for nutritious invertebrates. With the bulldozers still churning away at the site, killdeers and dunlins have reappeared.

A wildlife and fisheries specialist with the Park Service, affably named Daphne Hatch, recently told an interviewer: "We're pretty amazed at the level of bird use we've already seen. It's exciting that we're seeing so many shore birds. Some of them, like dunlins, haven't been seen in this part of the bay for decades. There just wasn't the habitat they needed – mud and sand flats."

Soon the dike surrounding the lagoon will be opened to the bay, initiating a true tidal marsh system – with its anticipated proliferation of estuarine invertebrates and fish. As a result, Ms Hatch predicts that the number and variety of shorebirds

will continue to rise through the fall and winter as they migrate from Alaska and Canada. In addition to the creation of a tidal marsh, several acres of duneland and beach have already been planted with more than 20,000 seedlings and slips of native grasses and shrubs – out of nearly 400,000 native plants which will ultimately shelter indigenous songbirds and other wildlife at this shoreline park.

Of course, nothing in this bay-side restoration will ever compare with the "moving frieze of flamingos" we observed nearly 40 years ago feeding at the Lalpuri Reservoir. But for some of us, the anticipation of new discoveries of this refurbished fold of land leading to the entrance of the San Francisco Bay offers a nearly comparable prospect. Already, just thirty miles north of the Golden Gate, a Curlew sandpiper was recently sighted at Bolinas Lagoon in Marin County. Here is a bird that breeds in a small area of northern Russia and usually winters in habitats ranging from central Africa through Southeast Asia to Australia – and is not even *supposed* to be in California. Even rarer, a White-winged tern spent the month of September south of the San Francisco Bay on Elkhorn Slough in Monterey County, only the second recorded sighting in California. Both events caused great excitement among the area's birdwatchers. And both events offer hope that someday such sightings may be commonplace at Crissy Field – at this restored strip of land reclaimed after two centuries from the prerogatives of human warfare.

For more on the Crissy Field restoration, check out the World Wide Web: www.nps.gov/goga/crissyp.htm

REVIEWS

BEFRIENDING BIRDS. DOSTEE KARU YA PAKSHANSHI (LET US MAKE FRIENDS WITH BIRDS). *KIRAN PURANDARE, Centre for Environmental Education, Pune*

Written in easy, flowing Marathi this is an excellent introduction to the birds of Maharashtra. It describes in some detail 50 common species and mentions in passing an equal number of others. There are 52 colour illustrations and some 100 black and white sketches, all of good quality. An introductory section acquaints us with morphology of the birds, their place in nature, and how to set about watching them. A concluding section adds a number of interesting bird anecdotes, describes bird habitats and gives hints on how to set down observations on birds that may be communicated, names and addresses of experts on birds from Maharashtra and a bibliography of Marathi bird literature. At the back are two maps of Maharashtra, one with locations of sanctuaries, national parks, heronries and other sites of interest, and another with district boundaries inviting the readers to record their observations. An altogether excellent effort by the author, the artists, the editors and publishers. This attractive little book should draw many more young Maharashtrians, especially from rural areas to the fascinating world of birds.

Madhav Gadgil

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THE DANCE OF THE SARUS. ESSAYS OF A WANDERING NATURALIST. *THEODORE BASKARAN, O.U.P. 240 Pages, Rs. 295*

Theodore Baskaran was born to be a naturalist. His childhood was spent in Dharapuram in Tamil Nadu and we learn that "when (he) was not in a classroom, (he) was either in the river or up in one of the *kudai seetha* trees" although many young people who love being out in the open, do not have a passionate interest in the natural world. By the time he was an adult he had absorbed a considerable amount of authentic knowledge about his surroundings. This serious interest was put to good use wherever he was forced to "wander" during his postings as a civil servant.

The book under review consists of several well defined sections - Birds, Mammals, Habitats, Issues, and a section on domestic creatures. I will confine myself to the section on birds which contains much information in which readers of the Newsletter will be interested. Being such a good observor he has always something significant to say about the behaviour or habitat or history of the species being described.

While writing about the sarus crane in the glowing terms which the bird merits, he remarks that because of the disappearance of wetlands (the prime need of the bird) they have begun to nest in paddy fields, which are temporary wetlands, and as a result they come into conflict with farmers who resent the damage done to their crops. Apparently the Kheda area of Gujarat was once the favoured habitat of these cranes, but the population of nesting pairs has decreased by as much as 15 per cent in recent years.

In the world of birds which are so transient and mobile, giving definite figures about their population is a hazardous undertaking. This is perhaps not impossible in the case of a bird like the great Indian bustard so large and conspicuous in open country. Yet I was surprised at the self-confidence of the author when he asserts that in the Sanctuaries of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, the total population including the 14 in Rannebennur is 7456, that is the figure for the whole country. For me it is a surprise that so many of these birds still remain.

Describing the familiar scene in Ranganthitu during the breeding season he writes : "As the sun came up and the temperature rose these storks came down to the water's edge to slake their thirst. Because of the gaps in their beaks, much water is spilt as they raise their heads to drink. The poor birds have to repeat the process a number of times before they can have their fill." This is a good example of careful observation.

While in Ahmedabad the author noticed a pair of lapwings in an open field, and by their general behaviour surmised that they were nesting. He kept a careful record of the nest, the eggs and the hatchlings : "The chicks .... were barely a few days old when .... torrential rains .... poured down incessantly throughout the night .... At first light I went out and scanned the ground with my binoculars. Incredible as it was three chicks

were busy feeding, with their parents keeping a watchful guard. The rain had claimed only (one) casualty". There seems to be good Disaster Management in the bird world.

He did a similar exercise with a pair of purple-rumped sunbirds in Sastri Nagar in Chennai, and saw the entire process of nest building and its final result. "Only the female was engaged in the nest building" and the male merely encouraged her by being around and possibly alerting her to any danger. "The material used in building the nest reflected the surroundings; it was coconut fibre mostly". On the 7th day the female occupied the nest. But the first egg was laid on the 9th, and the second on the 11th . After 16 days two tiny pink blobs were found in the nest. I am surprised that in the Nidification of the Birds of the British Empire, Stuart Baker gives no indication of the incubation period. Salim Ali and Hugh Whistler do not even refer to incubation. Does it mean that this is an area for further research ?

The Halflong Phenomenon is an exciting chapter. This strange occurrence of a multitude of bird species crashing into petromax lamps usually on misty October nights remains a mystery. While posted in Shillong he left "early in the morning passing through about 150 kms of primeval forest, and after crossing two rivers by ferry we reached Haflong after nightfall, in time to see the spectacle. "During the night they had "listed 16 species, ranging from the tiny paradise flycatcher to the wedge-tailed green pigeon. And at our spot 60 birds had been picked up."

One curious fact mentioned by Baskaran is that all the birds which died dashing into the lights were diurnal birds-not a single nocturnal species. The owls and the nightjars of which they were plenty around were never involved in this Hara Kiri.

The other chapters in the bird section (covering 63 pages in all) deal with Jerdon's courser and Blewit's owl before their re-discovery in Cuddapah in Andhra and Shahada in Madhya Pradesh, to the pelicans of Kokre-bellur, the flamingos of Porbunder, and the migrant white storks in Bangalore. Altogether delightful reading, and well worth possessing.

Zafer Futehally

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CORRESPONDENCE

BLACK-NECKED STORKS, SARUS CRANES AND DRONGO CHICKS. *N. SHIVA KUMAR, Corporate Communications, c/o. Indian Oil, A-1, Sector-I, NOIDA 201 301*

I would like to corroborate, the observation made by K.S. Gopi Sundar of Wildlife Institute of India, where he suggests counting of black-necked storks to be undertaken in the dry season.

On 20th June 1999 I also took up the Sarus Survey under the guidance of B.C. Choudhury, Scientist of WII. Accompanying me was my 9 year old son. Together we examined 7 sites and traveled nearly 100 km from dawn to dusk searching for the elusive sarus. We came across only four pairs of sarus cranes and all of them were found in the vicinity of water logged cultivated fields in different parts of Mathura District. Excepting one pair all others were found with the help of villagers who had ample knowledge of their movements.

Having stayed in Mathura from 1991 to 1996, I was also aware of the various locations of the possible sites where sarus cranes occur. But to my dismay not one was found at the designated spot. Over the years, there is certainly a decrease in the number of cranes sighted in and around the Mathura district mainly due to draining of water bodies and active construction work. In fact, so desperate is the situation of small and big wetlands vanishing that in the year 1995, I found one pair of sarus seeking solace right inside the 'thundering' Mathura Oil refinery. They were resting in an isolated patch of grassland close to the ecological park, which lures a variety of water birds.

During the sarus survey we ventured into a hamlet looking for 'big' birds as indicated by villagers near Chatta village. We only saw egrets 'punching' into the waters. Further ahead at an isolated spot in a deep depression approximately 20 x 30 feet across we noticed two adult and three sub-adult black-necked storks, a pair of white-necked storks, a pair of spoon bills and three egrets engrossed in feeding.

Unmindful of our presence they seemed to be in a great hurry to finish their fishy find under the hot summer sun. The time was 3 p.m.

Most wetlands in and around Mathura district dry out in the blazing heat. Even the mighty Yamuna river turns into a trickle attracting various birds. Only a few secluded deep-water bodies attract cranes and this is obviously the right time to take up a count not only of the black-necked stork but also the white-necked stork, the spoonbill, ibis, painted storks etc. The count of less 'exotic' birds like egrets should also be taken up to keep a trend of increase or decrease in their number. Summer like winter can be a good season to go bird watching, counting and photographing for avid ornithologists.

Mr. B.C. Choudhury of WII should in future years include other cranes and storks for his survey and also ensure that the 'unprotected' water bodies be given protection by the environment friendly villagers, who will be the real guardians of the sarus cranes in the coming years. Propaganda through regional and local newspapers is vital to alert the rustic folk about the importance of safeguarding our avian heritage.

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SIGHTINGS OF THE EUROPEAN ROLLER *(CORACIAS GARRULUS)* AND CROWBILLED DRONGO *(DICRURUS ANNECTANS)* IN CORBETT TIGER RESERVE, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA. *MAAN BARUA, Barua Bhavan, 107, M.C. Road, Uzan Bazaar, Guwahatti 781 001, Assam, India.*

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*

On 17 May 1996, Aniruddha Mukherjee and I were watching birds around Dhikhala in Corbett Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh. At about 06.35 hrs we saw a roller perched on a Haldu *Adina cordifolia* tree on the banks of the Ramganga river. On closer observation we noted the following characteristics: Crown, nape, ear-coverts, breast and rest of underparts aquamarine blue; mantle and tertials cinnamon-brown; blue greater coverts becoming darker towards median

and lesser coverts; black primaries and secondaries; blue tail with dark corners.

The bird was identified as an adult European roller *Coracias garrulus*, being easily distinguished from the Indian roller *C. benghalensis* by its black flight feathers (v. banded dark and light) and uniformly light blue breast and underparts (v. blue restricted to abdomen and vent). For comparison, there were both Indian rollers and dollarbirds *Eurystomus orientalis* on a nearby tree.

The European roller is a breeding summer visitor to West Pakistan, Jammu & Kashmir. It migrates to Arabia and presumably Africa in autumn, commonly passing through Sind, Rajasthan and Northern Gujarat (Ali and Ripley 1983, Grimmett *et al.*, 1998). Although Corbett Tiger Reserve is not within its normal migration route, there have been instances of birds straggling to parts of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh (Seoni District), south through Maharashtra (Dhule, Khandala, Bombay) to Karnataka (Karwar).

Crowbilled Drongo *(Dicrurus annectans)*

On 19 May 1996, I accompanied Rishad Naoroji to monitor the nest of a lesser fish eagle *Ichthyophaga humilis* situated on the Dhikhala-Dhangarhi road. At about 14.00 hrs, I came across a mixed-species flock in the forest patch where the nest was located. It consisted of birds such as fulvous-breasted woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei*, lesser yellownape *Picus chlorolophus*, paradise *Terpsiphone paradisi*, blue-throated *Cyornis rubeculoides* and tickell's blue flycatchers *C. tickelliae*, haircrested drongo *Dicrurus hottentotus*, etc. While watching the flock, my attention was drawn towards a drongo that looked markedly different from the haircrested drongos that were foraging nearby. I noted its main characters which can be summarised as follows:

Size and general colouration similar to that of the black drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*; structurally differing from *D. macrocercus* by broader and less deeply forked tail (although not as broad as in *D. hottentotus*); rather stout and thick bill (unlike *D. macrocercus*) and somewhat more stocky in appearance than other drongos.

I recognised the bird as a crowbilled drongo *Dicrurus annectans* as the "blunt" tail and a stouter, thicker bill than other drongos are characteristic of this species. The only other species it can be confused with is the black, but the latter has a deeply forked tail and a thinner bill. Moreover, the black drongo tends to prefer open areas and light woodland whereas the crowbilled is seldom met away from forest where it tends to forage in the middle storey rather than from exposed treetops. I am familiar with both crowbilled and black drongos after having seen them several times in northeastern India.

Although the seasonal movements of the crowbilled drongo are imperfectly known, it is a summer visitor (or resident, subject to seasonal movements) to the Himalayan foothills from North Uttar Pradesh (Kumaon) east to Arunachal Pradesh, and north-east India (Grimmett *et al.*, 1998, Ali and Ripley 1983).

Discussion

These are the first records of the European roller and crowbilled drongo from Corbett Tiger Reserve (Grewal and Sahgal 1995). The former is a straggler to the area as the reserve does not lie within its usual migration route. The crowbilled drongo is presumably a summer visitor to the area and hence has been overlooked due to the paucity of observations during this season.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rishad Naoroji and Aniruddha Mukherjee for their help and company in the field.

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[The European roller was seen by George Schaller when he visited Kihim. There is a note about it in our visitors book] *Editor.*

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NO SIGHTING OF SULTAN TIT IN PERIYAR TIGER RESERVE. *H.S.A. YAHYA, Centre for Wildlife & Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 002*

Since Mr. Ghosh had not mentioned the scientific name in his note (NLBW 39: 1), I got confused about the bird which is regretted. What I meant in my note (NLBW 39: 3) was *Parus xanthogenys*. Thanks to Mr. S. Karthikeyan (NLBW 39: 5) for pointing out the mistake. I have never sighted any *Melanochlora sultanea* in the Periyar Tiger Reserve, nor is there any such reference.

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GREAT PIED HORNBILL IN THE EASTERN SLOPES OF NILGIRIS. *A. BHOOPATHY (Advisor), Kotagiri Wildlife and Environment Association, 1/65, Sackatha, Aravenu 643 261, The Nilgiris, T.N.*

The forest of the eastern slopes of the Nilgiris is the habitat of the great pied hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*). Unfortunately it is being fragmented by tribal settlement and coffee plantations. Even in coffee estates the original fig and other fruit trees (so necessary for hornbills) are being replaced by the silver oak.

Date of Spotting	Place of Spotting	Taluk	No. of Birds
12-02-90	Aralyoor	Kotagiri	2
02-02-91	Arakkodu	-do-	1
04-03-92	Cliffy Slope	-do-	1
06-04-93	Konavakari Slope	-do-	1
18-12-93	Kolikorai	-do-	2
21-03-94	Kunjpanai	-do-	1
02-02-95	Medanadu	-do-	2
07-01-95	Marvala	-do-	1
03-04-96	Vagaipanai	-do-	2
09-03-96	Lowerdroog	Coonoor	2
10-09-97	Kallcor	Kotagiri	2
05-01-98	Chemmanarai Village	-do-	1
17-09-99	Kallcor	-do-	2

We have been watching the great pied hornbill from 1990-99 in the forest and coffee plantations of eastern slopes in Nilgiris: Aralyoor, Arakodu, Cliffy slope, Konavakorai slopes.

Kolikorai, Kunjapani, Medanadu, Marvala and Vegaipani. We have recorded its visits in summer, and between middle of February to end May. But in the year 1997 we watched them from December 18th to January 10th 1998 in the Kolikarai area. In the Kalloor area we spotted them on 10th September 1999. We have gathered the following details and also a photograph while it was perching on a dry branch in a coffee plantation in Kolikarai village.

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ARRIVAL OF SPOTBILLED PELICANS AT UPPALAPADU.

K. MRUTYUMJAYA RAO AND K. RAMANA KUMAR, Secretary, VANA VIKASA, D. No. 10-3-142, Panja Street, M.G. Road,Bapatla 522 101, Andhra Pradesh.

The Uppalapadu village in about 7 kms from Guntur on Gunturu - Tenali Road via Nandivelugu in Andhra Pradesh of Guntur district. The village water tank is very good refugee for various species of birds. This tank is a unique refugee for birds throughout the year. This type of habitats or water bird sanctuaries are few in India. Several water bird sanctuaries shelter the birds for 5 to 7 months only. Not only sheltering thousands of birds, this tank is also the breeding site for various species of birds.

35 species of resident and migratory birds visit this tank.

From 1989-90 onwards the tank is being observed for bird life. The resident birds such as cattle egrets, little egrets, little cormorants, open billed stocks, night herons were roosting on "prosopis". Other local birds like jacanas, moorhens spot billed ducks etc., were also residing in the tank. The tank is a very good refugee for cattle egrets. The roosting population of cattle egret varies according to seasons from 1000 to 10,000. Few cattle egrets are breeding at this site. 200 to 2000 little cormorants roost in the tank. There is no nesting activity of little cormorants in the tank. The tank is also a very good refugee for about roosting 1500 night herons. Night herons are also breeding in the tank. Chestnut and yellow bitterns were also seen in Typha around shallow water body. During 1992-94 white ibis, painted storks, glossy ibis arrived at the tank. White ibis increased their numbers from 200 to 1000. They are breeding in the tank. The number of painted storks increased from 5 to 350 with 90 active nests. Glossy ibis are occasional visitors to the tank. Spoon bills are also occasional visitors to the tank but the number is 2 to 4 only. The number of open billed storks at the beginning were 200 to 600 later reached to 3500. There were 7000 open bills during November 1998 with 300 nests and 5000 numbers in November, 1999 with 500 nests. A good number of rosy pastors visit this tank. Their number ranges from 300 to 10,000.

During January 1999 one spot-billed pelican visited the tank and stayed for 3 weeks. During 3rd week of January 2000, 26 pelicans arrived and they are mating and have started their nesting activities.

The villagers are bitterly complaining that the water is getting polluted due to excreata of birds. They are claiming that itching, rashes and other skin diseases are spreading due to pollution of water by bird droppings. The children, women and elderly people are suffering severely and want to get rid of birds from the tank.

It was stated by Sri Peddi Appaji, Sarpanch of Uppalapadu that the Panchayat wants to dry out the entire remaining portion of vegetation in the tank and wants to construct bund across it or to clear entire vegetation during March/April of this year, so that the birds will leave the tank permanently.

Two years ago D.F.O. Sri K.V.S. Subramanyam opened an eco club at Uppalapadu high school. On 3.2.2000 Sri B. Ananda Mohan, DFO, Guntur visited the tank along with us and made some suggestions to the high school head master and others at Uppalapadu.

Sri Peddi Appaji, Sarpanch of Uppalapadu arranged appointment with M.L.A., on 17.2.2000. We along with Sri Appaji, Sri M. Seetharamaiah of Uppalapadu, Sri B. Sudhakar, Sri E.L. Narayana and Sri K. Srinivass Kumar of Bapatla met M.L.A., Sri Makineni Peda Ratnaiah and represented the problem and have requested him to take necessary action for protecting the tank. Even though he was very busy at that time, he was kind enough to hear all the history of this bird habitat and the problems and has given an assurance to protect the habitat and also to solve the water problem. He has assured further development of the habitat, planting of bird attracting trees etc.

We request you to help us in our efforts by writing to the Chief Minister of A.P., Principal Chief Conservator and Chief Wildlife Warden of Andhra Pradesh, requesting them to protect this unique heronry.

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ERRATA

The note on duetting by drongo cuckoos in NLBW 39 (5) : 72 was authored jointly by K.S. Gopi Sundar and Rajah Jaypal. Omission of the latter's name is regretted.

As for the calls of drongo cuckoo, Wright (Dehra Dun, 1957) has confirmed the observation recorded more than two decades earlier by Osmaston in Birds of Debra Dun and Adjacent Hills (1935).

In the article written by H. Daniel Wesley "Nest Sites of Sunbird" in NLBW 39(5): 79, read the name of the monkey occurring in Thanjavur as *Bonnet Monkey*.

Editor

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Cover : **Male Roseringed Parakeet** (*Psittacula kramori*) This alluring grass green coloured parakeet with cherry red hooked beak, prefers to live in flocks. The flocks collect to roost in large avenue trees and groves, travelling long distances from their feeding grounds in swift direct flight, uttering loud shrill calls. Presently their numbers have declined alarmingly due to loss of avenue trees and nesting sites, and the ongoing pet trade.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS